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**WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT
LONG TERM INCARCERATION?**

NO. 1984-17

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I would like to begin my presentation with a conclusion and then proceed with evidence as to why I have taken such a position.

As a practicing psychologist and researcher in our prison system, one of my concerns has been the impact of long-term imprisonment. Scientifically speaking the phenomenon is intriguing, indeed in many cases quite perplexing. In fact, stated simply: we really know very little about the effects of long term incarceration.

It goes without saying that if we are to examine the treatment and management of long term offenders, or if we are to develop sound policies and effective programs, we should understand something about the impact of lengthy incarceration on our clientele.

Similarly, if we insist on continuing to sentence offenders to lengthy terms, and especially if we continue on the current trend of giving even longer sentences for serious offenses than has been our tradition, then we should know more about what we're getting into.

To give you an appreciation of the number of long term offenders and some of their personal characteristics, the following data are reported from one of our recently completed studies.

A selection criterion based on a sentence length of 21 years or more was established. This includes post-1977 sentences of life - minimum 25 years, life - minimum 10 years, pre-1977 sentences of life - minimum 7 years, the previously employed indefinite sentences of DSO and HO, their replacement, the D.O. sentence, and all fixed definite sentences of 21 years or more. The 21 years was chosen as a criterion so that all offenders who can be virtually guaranteed a minimum incarceration of 7 years would be included (i.e., the earliest possible release for a 21 year sentence or the old life sentence).

by mid 1973 we found:

Total N = 1650 X = (15%) of the CSC inmate population
11000

In mid 1983, 1650, or 15% of the 11,000 inmates incarcerated in CSC institutions were identified according to this selection process. In this group, approximately 200 can be described as 'very long term offenders' in that we can reasonably expect them to be incarcerated for 25 years. (The remaining breakdown was 600 in the 10 to 25 years category, 600 in 7 to 10 years, 100 with fixed sentences over 21 years, 50 DSO's, 35 HOs and 30 DOs).

As expected, the majority (912 or 55%) are held in maximum security institutions. This is followed by mediums (532 or 33%), minimums (165, 10%) and other (provincial, hospital) facilities 13, 8%).

Most long-term offenders can be found in Ontario (507 or 31%) or Quebec Regions (415, 25%) followed by the Prairies (298, 18%) Pacific (269, 16%) and Atlantic (135, 8%) Regions.

In terms of possible security risk, 14% (226 cases) have a history of at least one UAL.

About one-third (582 or 36%) have already served more than 7 years, while more than one-half (856, 53%) have served from 1 to 7 years and the remainder (184, 11%) are in the first year of their sentence.

Various versions of murder comprise the vast majority of offences (78%). A breakdown of the most prevalent offenses are as follows:

Murder (1st and 2nd)	814 (49.5%)
Murder (capital, noncapital)	469 (28.5%)
Robbery (Armed, violence)	60 (3.6%)
Attempted murder	41 (2.5%)

Dangerous Sexual Offenders	41 (2.5%)
Manslaughter	32 (1.9%)
Rape	30 (1.8%)

The majority (71%) are serving their first federal incarceration while only 3% have more than two federal incarcerations. As a result, the average previous federal time served upon current admission is 1.4 years.

As a group, long-term offenders are older than the average CSC inmate, having a mean age of 35.8. While 30% (501) of the cases are at least 40 years of age, 38% (618) are in their 30's, and 31% (509) in their 20's.

A total of 131 offenders (8%) claimed racial backgrounds of North American Indian (6%) or Metis (2%).

At the time of their incarceration 32% or 525 long-term inmates claimed to have an existing marital relationship (married, 18%; common law, 14%). Over one-half (52%) were single, with the remaining being divided equally among divorced, separated or widowed (5%).

Criminological theories of prisonization don't work for traditional incarceration, let alone long term imprisonment. Only recently has this fact been acknowledged by theoreticians (Thomas, 1970; 1977).

It seems that proponents of what has been described as the "importation model" and the "deprivation model", have been too busy rebutting one another to critically examine their own position.

Stated simply, the importation position contends that the impact of imprisonment depends on the personal and background characteristics with which one enters prison, while the deprivation position contends that the security of prison conditions affects the degree of inmate sub-culturalization.

Similarly, long held beliefs in forensic psychiatry about long-term incarceration are also being challenged. Specifically Ganser in 1878 described what became known as the Ganser Syndrome as a 'peculiar hysterical twilight state', accompanied by a clouding of consciousness, and, upon questioning, the giving of close but incorrect answers and caused by lengthy institutionalization (Shorer, 1965). However, there seems to be increasing confusion over the nature and even existence of this clinical syndrome. APA (1979) now describes it as a factitious disorder under the voluntary control of the patient.

In sum, as social scientists, we have been long on rhetoric and short on substantiated, empirical facts. Radzinowicz, in his 1968 report to the Advisory Council on the Penal Systems to the British Home Office said:

"Practically nothing is known about the vital subject of the lasting effects on human personality of long-term imprisonment, yet pronouncements on the subject continue to be made and very long prison sentences continue to be imposed."

This position is echoed by McKay et al (1979) in their 1979 review. Their most striking impression was the paucity of systematic research devoted to the area.

A review of what literature does exist on long term confinement reveals a striking and consistent discrepancy. On the one hand, we find experiential, qualitative descriptions that document the severe, sometimes hideous and tragic, effects of incarceration. On the other hand, we have the objective, quantitative studies, that are quivocal at best. As McKay et al (1979) state:

"one of the strongest impressions to emerge in reviewing the long term incarceration literature is the striking discrepancy between personal accounts and the data-based research describing it."

The criticisms of both approaches are obvious. Clearly, personal accounts can include considerable bias. In fact, many do, which is not unexpected, since the author is often the kept and is describing environmental conditions and their effects that are the responsibility of his adversary, the keeper. Besides, "The Joy of Prison" would never sell. Secondly, anecdotal reports can be found to support virtually any hypothesis. For example, if we have 200 inmates who will spend most of their lives in prison and if Statistics Canada (1981) is correct in its projection that 12½% of our population will be hospitalized at least once during their lives for a mental disorder, we can expect that 25 of these current lifers will require psychiatric hospitalization during their long term confinements, and more than 25 if they represent a subset of our national population that is particularly at risk for mental illness (for example, if they disproportionately represent low socioeconomic groups).

Nonetheless, as diverse as such authors as Jack Abbott (1981), Roger Caron (1975), Eldridge Cleaver (1969), and Alexander Solzhenitsyn (1968) might be, their compelling and persuasive writings are clear and consistent in their presentation of long term confinement.

On the other hand, the data-based research can be criticized for its lack of completeness, and its

methodological inadequacies. Specifically, simulations are problematic in that they are a far cry from the reality of imprisonment, true experimental efforts are impossible in prison, and the accuracy of any quantitative survey is only as good and as sensitive as the measurement instruments it employs.

Nonetheless, since this literature is generally less well known than the popular and traditional view of incarceration and its effects, I'd like to review a sample of the work.

Flanagan (1982) has recently observed that conventional wisdom, which once inexorably linked long term incarceration to deterioration of personality, has undergone a profound change. This has been due to findings of several investigators where objective tests yielded virtually no convincing evidence that systematic deterioration occurs in any of the physical, psychological, attitudinal or cognitive realms of human functioning. Indeed, there now exists a literature, large enough to command some attention that implies, a positive effect of incarceration.

At the risk of taking an empiricists's excursion into this currently assembled lions den, I present such a position. (I add, parenthetically, that it is taken, in part, as a devil's advocate, but only in part).

The most methodologically sound and convincing studies were done by a group of British reseachers. Their research culminated in a longtitudinal study of 175 offenders sentenced to at least 10 years and having served from two to eleven years. Subjects were administered a test battery which was then repeated two years latter. The follow-ups revealed no evidence of psychological deterioration. In fact, verbal intelligence showed a significant improvement and hostility decreased over time.

Similarly, recent studies in German prisons report developments toward conventional attitudes and decreased psychopathology among incarcerates who had served 13 years (Rasch 1981) and no general personality deterioration after up to 20 years of imprisonment (Bresser & Goeman, 1976).

In America, social gerontologists have used prison data to debate the importance of social and cultural aspects of aging versus the invariance of chronological age. Reporting on a group of older prisoners, having a median age of 60 and who had served an average of 23 years in a major state penitentiary, Reed and Glamser (1979) found that the traditional experience of aging was not present and prisoners appeared and reported feeling younger than their chronological age. This observation is also made in prisoners' biographies. Jackson (1969) has noted:

"There's something else funny that happens to some people: they come down here and their age seems to fix about what it was when they came in. Down here I see guys all the time that are sixty or seventy-five who look like forty to forty-five. Physically they stay younger.

My interest in this 'positive effect' hypothesis was stimulated by some of our research at the Regional Psychiatric Centre in Saskatoon. Over a three year period, we observed that offenders who had served longer time were less pathological and more pro-social. Thinking this was an artifact of our assessment, or referral procedure various controls were initiated, and objective data were systematically evaluated. For example, 270 MMPI's were examined as a function of Time Served since sentencing. Small, but significant negative correlations ($-.12$ to $-.26$) were found on 8 of the 10 clinical scales meaning that those who had been incarcerated longer displayed less psychopathology. Of course, those with longer sentences, could have been less deviant to begin. Indeed, sentence length was also inversely correlated with deviance, the long term offender being less deviant regardless of time served, thus supporting the contention that lifers are a positive, stabilizing influence. Therefore, sentence length was controlled, by partialling out its contribution to the correlation. Similarly, adjustments were made for age, which was also correlated with stability. Furthermore, the analysis was repeated eliminating

offenders who had served less than 6 months because it is popularly contended that maladjustment is particularly prominent during the first few months of incarceration because of the trauma of the judicial process and ones' removal from the community. Finally, the calculations were repeated eliminating all lifers, because they tend to have served more time and seen to be better adjusted. On all occasions this curious inverse relationship between psychopathology and time served was maintained.

Only once did it disappear. When a subset of the sample consisting only of native offenders was analyzed, there was absolutely no relationship.

We would be wise to lead the insightful observations of the American criminologist Donald Cressey (1973):

" The prison does not do anything at all. It just sits there - upstate, across the bay, or on the edge of town, ugly, menacing. What counts is the subtle specifics of each prisoner's participation in prison life.

Cressey goes on to warn, however:

"Prison life is made up of social interactions that are confused, entangled, complicated and so subtle in their effects that any detailed attempt to tell what happens to them sounds like the mouthings of a crazy man".

The subtlety about which Cressey talks is illustrated in some of our own follow-up research on self-esteem. Curiously enough, we found that increases in self-esteem, presumably a positive attribute, during incarceration was positively correlated with recidivism over a three year period. Another finding, that an increased sense of inadequacy during imprisonment was relative to post-release success, provided clues as to how these results might be unravelled. Indeed, knowing what we do about the incarceration process, one might expect those who develop greater self-esteem in the prison environment would actually be at greater risk for recidivism. Therefore, the data were reanalyzed, concomitantly looking at how offenders changed in terms of their criminal orientation. A rather dramatic and revealing picture unfolded. Those offenders whose increase in self-esteem occurred in conjunction with an increase in criminal orientation experienced the most frequent and severe recidivism. Interestingly, of the remaining 3 groups, those who increased in their criminal identification in prison, while experiencing a falling sense of self-esteem, emerged three years later as the most successful.

In summary, lengthy sentencing will have many complicated and diverse effects. For every 'Belly of the Beast' (Abbott, 1981) there is another long term offender who becomes a 'Bird man of Alcatraz' (Stroud,).

Similarly, there are countless descriptions, such as the following:

"The long term institutional resident or inmate unless he is of exceptional strength from the beginning, has some fixed external point towards which to orient, or the institution provides stimulation for him, may degenerate in his person to become not only 'mindless' but will-less and guiltless".

(Ham, 1976)."

There are also personal accounts like this:

"In the midst of what is meant to punish and degrade, art and literature and religion revive and flourish. Not in great crowds, but here and there...these sporadic fly-up in downtimes and are seen by others, our task is to see that they are not put out. The artists and writers who begin and grow behind these walls; who overcome that solitude, who build faith where only platitudes existed before, are true soldiers of their people."

(Caves, 1980)

Certainly, there can be, indeed are, deleterious effects of lengthy imprisonment. A single suicide, or self-mutilation is tragic, whenever it occurs, regardless of its incidence, or base rate. Yet to claim these are straightforward and inevitable consequences of long term incarceration is simplistic, if not erroneous, and will only divert us from the truly important questions: What are the specific adverse effects of incarceration? Who will experience them? Why and when will they be

experienced? And how can be ameliorate them? These are the questions we should be asking in our planning and programming for the long term offender.

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